

in pu.
no. Hist.
(Ireland.)

HOME RULE.

BY

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“And Pharaoh said, I will let you go; only ye shall not
go very far away.”—EXODUS viii. 28.

London:
REEVES & TURNER, 196, STRAND.
—
1886.

[Price One Penny.]

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
3 1761 01496833 3

HOME RULE.

I do not desire the complete separation of Ireland from England, but I do not fear it. The two countries have many interests in common, both public and private; and if they can arrange some terms of union which shall be acceptable to each, and shall give to each the inestimable advantage of Home Rule, it will be a happy consummation. But sooner than go on as we have been doing for the last hundred years, and especially for the last ten years, I should welcome complete separation.

The object of these pages is to advocate self-government for both countries. I say for both countries. For who is so simple, such a slave of phrases, as to maintain that England enjoys self-government, when Ireland has a veto upon English legislation. Not indeed a veto in theory; I could bear that with much equanimity; but what is far more galling, a practical and most real veto; a veto which is felt at every turn and which will certainly continue to be felt as long as the union is maintained in its present form.

What a blinded fanatic that man must be—I do not care whether he is a costermonger or an ex-Cabinet Minister—who can find in our nominal government of Ireland any set off against her real government of England. At the present moment it is her yoke which galls us, not ours which galls her. Just let us reckon up how it works.

What do the bulk of Irishmen most want? There is no sort of doubt about it. They want, in Mr. Parnell's words, to keep a firm grip of their homesteads, and to pay only such rent as in their own judgment they can afford.

Well, they are practically doing just that. There are thirty-two millions of us to less than five millions of them. But we cannot collect those rents, and we cannot evict the tenants. We have tried it, and we have had to give

it up as a bad job. It was practically given up when Mr. Morley said that he would not send the redcoats to support the crowbar brigade except when he thought proper.

Some people complained that this was very arbitrary talk. But what says the discontented Mr. Chamberlain, who cannot bring himself to surrender the proud supremacy of the Imperial Parliament? He would make a law to suspend all evictions, and advance the amount of the non-recoverable rents to the landlords out of the public treasury—that is to say, out of Englishmen's pockets—till a settlement can be arrived at. Poor John Bull must grin and bear it, content with such satisfaction as he can get out of the reflection that he still continues to “govern Ireland.” Odds whips and scorpions! if that is the Birmingham alternative to the Land Purchase Bill, I had rather forego the honour. I like not such grinning honour.

Ireland then has practically got her way already. The supremacy of the Imperial Parliament is nominally intact. Only, the Queen's writ does not run; and Mr. Chamberlain, to save appearances, will make a law that it shall not run.

But if the English yoke on Ireland has come in these days of Carnarvon and Morley to be easy, and its burden practically light, the Irish yoke on England is a reality of the sternest kind. We have a string of reforms waiting to be carried, and a huge Liberal majority of ninety-six (excluding all Irish members) prepared to carry them. But the Irish (whom we have the proud satisfaction of governing) prohibit us from touching them. A London Municipality? Veto. Secular Education for Board Schools? Veto. County Boards, Land Law Reform, Railway Reform, Water Supply Reform, Enfranchisement of Leaseholds, Wind-up of City Companies? Veto. Veto. Veto.

None of these questions can even be effectively submitted to public opinion outside Parliament. For such is the block of Reforms waiting for legislation that the public will not nowadays bend itself to the serious con-

sideration of any one of them until its turn for consideration in Parliament is seen to have arrived. People will not waste their time on projects of law which may have to wait years before they can be dealt with. In the meantime, 556 members for Great Britain are kept slaving at Irish questions, great and small, in which the mass of British electors neither have nor feel the slightest interest. This may be very glorious. It may enable Her Majesty the Queen and Empress to hold her head some inches higher among the sovereigns of Europe. It may inflate an upper-class Englishman with a sense of imperial grandeur. But it is time the ordinary elector, the working man and the small tradesman, asked himself how he is a gainer by it.

“What an ignoble ideal,” cries a West-End journalist, “is this that you are holding up before the workman! Are great questions of policy, on which all educated men agree, to be treated from his purely personal standpoint?”

In the first place, Mr. West-End journalist, all educated men are *not* agreed, as you know very well. But let that pass. “Education,” as you understand the word, has very little connection with political insight, and still less with true patriotism. What you mean by educated men, are people whose parents could afford to send them to schools and colleges, from which most of them brought away nothing in the way of education but a wretched smattering of dead languages and mathematics. Say “well-to-do people” at once, for that is what you mean. Well, they have had the management of England hitherto, and we see what they have made of it—a very pleasant country for well-to-do people. In future, the working class are going to have, I do not say the management of England—I am well aware that except in very exceptional moments they will never have that—but considerable influence over its management; and you may depend upon it that they will try to make England a somewhat pleasanter place for the working class than it has been hitherto.

There happens to be an important difference between the “personal stand-point” of the workman and that of the well-to-do citizen. It has been thus expressed by

Auguste Comte. "The working class is not, properly speaking, a class at all, but constitutes the body of society. From it proceed the various special classes, which we may regard as organs necessary to that body." From which it follows that any political or social arrangements which are for the true and permanent advantage of the working class, are for the advantage of the community as a whole; and that to aim at such arrangements is to set up not an ignoble ideal, but the noblest that can be conceived.

Now one of the first things the working man is likely to find out, when he comes to consider how he shall use his political influence, is that big states and empires exist mainly for the advantage of big people. There are few well-to-do Englishmen who have not one or more relatives snugly provided for by posts which would disappear if we gave up the Imperial business. You yourself, Mr. Journalist, I strongly suspect, once drew an enormous salary in India, and are still quartered on the Indian Revenue. Every fresh annexation means new prizes and promotion for officials. The working class has nothing to do with all this.

Pride in the ever extending area of British territory, and the vast population subject to our rule, is a feeling confined to the well-to-do. It is a survival of military manners, and of the old belief that the material prosperity as well as the glory of any nation depended on its ability to bully its neighbours. The working class, inheriting not military but industrial manners and ideas does not share this sentiment. It has no thirst for war, conquest, or dominion. All its aspirations are peaceful, and therefore inconsistent with any political union which is not perfectly voluntary. "Imperial Democracy" has no existence except in the schemes and dreams of half-trained statesmen and half-crazy publicists.

Our superior friend, the West-End journalist, is beginning to have his misgivings. "Demos is henceforth our master. * * * How will Home Rule affect him? Has it anything to do with three acres and a cow? Is not the United Kingdom the work of the rich, and would not its dismemberment, perhaps, give the poor man his chance?"

That is the way in which the poor blind giant is half inclined to consider the question." Yes, my superior friend, and very soon you will find him wholly inclined to consider it in that way. You can have no idea till you come to try it, how hard it will be to make him see what he gains by lending you his strength to hold India or Ireland. Your own case is clear enough. You know on which side your bread is buttered. Why should not he consider the question from the same point of view?

The workman is quite right in his suspicion, that the bigness of our Empire is an obstacle to the improvement of his condition. He has only to look at the debates of the House of Commons from the beginning of the session to the end. He will find that when the members are not occupied with Ireland, they are busy with Egypt or Afghanistan or South Africa; anything rather than the condition of English workmen. On wars in those distant lands, millions of money are squandered with hardly a show of opposition. But in a hard winter like that we have just passed through, when half our workmen are unemployed, Parliament has not a word to say or a penny to spare for them.

I will venture to quote here some words I wrote twenty years ago.

"The wealth, greatness, and glory of England have meant very little for the working man. Rather they have adjourned his emancipation. It is his interest—and it cannot be much longer concealed from him—that public attention should be concentrated on the state of England. The re-casting of our constitution, the redistribution of taxation, the substitution of a system of education for a state church, the limitation of proprietary rights in land, poor law reform, sanitary reform, legal reform, in a word—the subordination of private interests to public utility—these are questions that cannot be dealt with even by public opinion while our energies and attention are wasted on the management of two hundred millions of people who do not belong to us. The direct, though not continuous, intervention of working men in the government of the country will be signalised by a refusal to let it be en-

cumbered any longer with this millstone of an empire. To the working man it is of little consequence whether the Union Jack flies at Gibraltar, Quebec, and Calcutta; but of infinitely great importance that he have a fair share of the profits of production; that the necessaries and comforts of life be within his reach; that poison be not infused into the air he breathes and the water he drinks; that rational education be provided for his children, and that his legitimate dignity be not wounded by institutions designed to consecrate and perpetuate social inequality. The present generation must make up its mind to see these questions raised, and the next, probably, to see them settled."

Since those words were written we have had two Reform Bills. The working classes do not yet swamp the other electors because they are handicapped by sly regulations about registration, hours of polling, and so on. But even now they weigh heavily, and the first result of their intervention is a movement for Home Rule, which is rapidly spreading from Ireland to England, Wales and Scotland. When we have Home Rule for England there will be some chance that workmen's questions will come to the front. Workmen and non-workmen will have to be brought face to face in comparatively small governmental areas if the former are to have anything like a fair chance of getting their interests attended to. Home Rule for Ireland is the first and most obviously practical step in this direction.

Mr. Chamberlain says he is against the Bill because the tendency of modern Europe is to unification rather than separation. It is a thousand pities that so able a man should be so imperfectly informed. A fuller acquaintance with facts and a sounder theory of history would have taught him the worthlessness of his crude and hasty generalisation. Religious wars in the 16th and 17th centuries, commercial wars in the 18th, revolutionary wars in the 19th, have, it is true, driven the peoples of Europe to suspend their abiding and normal predilection for Home Rule in obedience to the exigencies of attack and defence. But the ascendancy of industrial and pacific manners, now near at hand, will remove all induce-

ment for a degree of concentration which sacrifices the full and healthy development of political existence.

Even during the present century the tendency has not been upon the whole towards unification. Survey Europe from north to south. Russia has swallowed Finland and Poland, but she cannot digest them. Finland has her separate national institutions, and makes steady progress towards complete Home Rule. The Polish national spirit is inextinguishable, and must sooner or later prevail. Norway was conquered by the Swedish King in 1814; but, though the two countries remain under one sovereign, the smaller is completely independent of the larger. The Austrian Emperor, after conquering Hungary and destroying her independence in 1849, was obliged to restore it completely in 1867; and his motley dominions are now only held together by the concession of various degrees of Home Rule. Germany has been driven to unify—for military purposes only—by fear of France and Russia; Italy by fear of France and Austria. But that the unification will continue in either case when the danger shall have passed away I do not the least believe. Holland and Belgium were unified in 1815; but the latter regained its independence in 1830. The country we call Spain is still known to its own inhabitants as “the Spains”; and provincial feeling remains so strong that when the monarchy disappears it will very likely be succeeded by a Federal Republic.

Perhaps the argument most persistently brandished in the face of English sympathisers with the Irish demand for Home Rule is that it will lead, and is meant to lead, to separation. It may be remarked in passing that the same people who say this will tell you in the next breath that the bulk of the disaffected Irish really care for nothing but the Land question, and that Mr. Parnell would never have got them even to nibble at Home Rule if he had not baited it with Tenant Right. But the latter of these two conflicting lines of argument produces no effect on the English workman. It appeals to the small but powerful class of Englishmen who own land or hold mortgages in Ireland, or whose relations do; or

who, being English landlords, look on Irish landlords as an outpost of landlordism to be defended as long as possible. Our workmen have heard something of the Irish landlord, and there is no being so hateful to them. But they could hardly be expected to feel much enthusiasm for Home Rule if it really menaced the safety and welfare of their own country. Let us consider this bugbear.

There was a time, and it is not so far distant, when in the race for bigness, any weak country did run a risk of being snapped up, merely to add to the acreage and population of a powerful neighbour. I believe that many people are so unobservant as to imagine that this danger is as great as ever. Certainly, I have often heard the remark that if we dropped Ireland she would be annexed by France or America. One is almost ashamed to undertake a serious refutation of so ludicrous a delusion. Ninety years ago the French government of that day did plan a conquest of Ireland; and many Irishmen at that time would have welcomed it. But even then Bonaparte pooh-poohed the scheme, pointing out to the Directory that Ireland was much more embarrassing to England as she was than if she were a French province. At the present time it may be safely said, that there is not a single Irishman or a single Frenchman who would listen to such a proposal with patience. That many, perhaps most Irishmen, would gladly join the United States, I quite believe. But nothing is more certain than that if Mr. Parnell went down on his knees for it, and Mr. Gladstone joined in his entreaties, the United States would not accept Ireland at any price. It has been a wise rule of their policy from the first, to annex no trans-marine territory, and Ireland is certainly the last country for which they would break it.

I have thought it well to notice this absurd delusion, because I know that it prevails widely among ill-informed people. No statesman would think of countenancing it, except perhaps Lord Randolph Churchill, if he found himself addressing a peculiarly ignorant audience, where there happened to be no reporters. Need I stop to examine the fearful probability that four millions and three-quarters of

Irishmen would attempt an invasion of the thirty-two millions who inhabit this island? There are people, I know, who measure the distance from Kingstown to Holyhead, or worse still from the coast of Antrim to the Mull of Cantire, and shake their heads. But there are some things one cannot argue about with gravity.

The military disadvantages of Home Rule or separation usually dwelt upon, are of quite another kind. It is said we had better hold Ireland fast while we have got her, because it would be a difficult matter to re-conquer her. Certainly it would. And glad I am to think it. To chastise her if she deserved it would be easy enough. But if she were separated from us to-morrow, for any reason or by any means, there would not in twelve months time be a single public man in England who would desire to re-conquer her. Whatever shape chastisement might take, it would not be that. Don't tell me that we should go back to collect taxes or rents, or to take the part of an oppressed Ulster. When once John Bull has tasted the blessing of freedom from the Irish yoke, nothing will induce him to run his neck into it again.

As for the ancient parties, the certainty that they will have to get along together somehow, and settle their differences without the intervention of Lord Randolph Churchill, is the one thing needed to make them drop their weapons. Material interests will assert themselves. It is not the well-to-do people who have anything to fear. They will manage in the long run to hold their own in Ireland, as they have done everywhere else from the beginning of history; and, for the matter of that, considerably more than their own. At present they are heavily weighted by our impotent championship. When the curtain rises, and self-governing Ireland is discovered entering on her new career, it will be found that parties have sorted themselves with amazing promptitude, and after a quite unexpected fashion. The sight of Mr. Parnell and Mr. Healy with Down and Antrim at their back, rallying the party of order, restoring confidence, re-enlisting the old constabulary, suppressing moonlighters, passing an alien act for the benefit of Mr. O'Donovan Rossa, and haggling

with Messrs. Rothschild about the price of issue of a 4 per cent. loan, will make people over here rub their eyes. The landlords who, unwisely relying on Opera-house unanimity, and the political acumen of Professor Tyndall and the Poet Laureate, allowed the sand to run out of Mr. Gladstone's hour-glass, will cling to the uncrowned king, and console themselves with the reflection that he is the owner of acres in Wicklow, and has granite quarries to develop. History has yet to furnish an example of any community failing to organise adequate protection for life and property, when foreign complications are not present.

And now observe. When once we have realised that union with Ireland is not so valuable to us as to be worth any considerable sacrifice, from that moment it becomes possible to establish it on a solid and permanent basis. For the truth is that Ireland has vastly more to gain by union than we have. Oddly enough this important truth is being constantly asserted by English politicians who yet have not the good sense and courage to act upon it. It is a truth which hitherto has been somewhat obscured from the perception of the Irish, because they have never yet had occasion to give it a thought. But it must certainly have afforded matter for serious reflection within the last few weeks to those able and distinguished Irishmen who are likely soon to be responsible for the government of their country.

What it comes to is this. The Irish are at present masters of the situation, because we are afraid of separation and they are not, or rather think they are not. But the moment we make up our minds that it will be better for us to separate than to be governed by Ireland—which is virtually our fate now—we are in a position to offer them independence on either the colonial or federal model, subject to all such conditions as we can reasonably desire to impose. At present, Mr. Gladstone is challenged to prove that the guarantees he has devised will be of any avail against the bad faith or ill will of the Irish people. It must be confessed that there are only two possible guarantees

which can be worth anything: either a readiness on our part to reconquer Ireland, or a readiness to cast her off; and of these, the latter has the advantage in respect of justice, cheapness, ease, rapidity, and, in my opinion, efficacy.

How humiliating is the position now of an English minister in negotiation with Mr. Parnell. The latter, as in duty bound, resents every guarantee as an indignity, haggles over every penny of money, treats every restriction as a rag of the old tyranny, and after all—reasonably enough—points out his inability to pledge his successors to be satisfied with the concessions made now. The minister cannot threaten coercion, for the weapon has broken in his hand, and no coercion is of any use unless it is carried to a point which public opinion here is not prepared to tolerate. What a novel and inspiring sensation of strength would he experience if he could meet every unreasonable demand or unfulfilled obligation with the threat, not of doing something, but of ceasing to do something. Get us into no scrapes with foreign powers or we dissolve partnership; pay up your Federal contribution, or we cut you adrift; vote additional supplies for this war and call out your militia, as we are doing, or we shall leave you to make the best terms you can with the enemy; boycott our goods, and we shall boycott yours. What refreshing language this would be!

As long as our demands were reasonable and fair in themselves, enlightened self-interest would ensure their acceptance. Just consider what disruption of the Union would then mean for Ireland. Where could she raise a loan except in England? Where could she send her produce except to England? Where could an Irish joint stock company be floated except in London? Irishmen in our army or navy or civil service, Irish clergymen, doctors and lawyers residing in England, would they like to be called on to opt between English and Irish nationality? How would Irishmen get on abroad without the protection of English ambassadors and consuls? Would they, the poorest nation in Europe, like to go to the expense of setting up a separate army, navy, and diplo-

matic service? If Ireland undervalues these advantages now, it is because she has to set against them the denial of Home Rule. Concede Home Rule, and they become clear boons, not to be lightly thrown away or trifled with.

Mr. Gladstone has told us plainly that he has introduced the so-called guarantees into his Bill only as a concession to jealousies which he did not share, and regarded as a weakness. I have no doubt he sees clearly what I have endeavoured to point out, that in the well-proved absence of a determination on the part of the English people to trample out Irish patriotism by brute force, there is only one guarantee for the maintenance of the Union which is of any efficacy; and that is a readiness to throw up the Union. "He that loveth his life shall lose it, but he that hateth it shall keep it unto life eternal." Let Mr. Gladstone plant a firm foot on reality. Let him drop these idle and irritating precautions. He will not only conciliate the Irish, but he will pull the linchpin out of the whole argument of such a critic as Mr. Justice Stephen. As long as he admits that the Union is something never to be surrendered he puts the long arm of the lever into the hand of Mr. Parnell, and furnishes the Imperialists with an opportunity of scoring a petty triumph in the conflict of words.

I have not pretended to deal in these few pages with all the subordinate issues that have arisen in the Home Rule controversy. It was the less necessary to do so because I have gone straight to the root of the matter. If I have seemed to argue the question chiefly from the point of view of English interests, I trust no one will suspect me of placing these above English duties. I am addressing myself principally to our working men, and I know that after all nothing moves them so much as an appeal to their sense of justice and moral right. They do not need to be reminded of the cruel wrongs our country has inflicted on Ireland, wrongs which we only began to redress seventeen years ago. I believe they will think that it is not enough to redress these wrongs, but that some reparation for them is due. While I would not pay a penny to Ireland by way of blackmail, or as a bribe to induce her

to accept a settlement which does not and ought not to satisfy her, I would cheerfully make her a parting gift of the fifty millions which the landlords have spurned, to be expended on public works, as some compensation for the poverty in which English rule has sunk her. I believe our workmen would give it for such a purpose with an open heart, though they naturally grudge it to the landlords.

I cannot conclude these remarks without testifying my admiration for the sagacity and pluck which Mr. Gladstone has displayed in this crowning achievement of his career. I may call it so, though the immediate issue is still uncertain. For nothing can now undo the work of the last month, even should its author not live to witness its final success.

It has been a magnificent stand that the old general has made, let it end for the moment how it will. I must confess I did not think he had it in him. Superhuman efforts were made to impress the public with the idea that the proposal was a huge joke, that it was scouted by the whole nation, that Mr. Gladstone stood absolutely alone, that he was a lunatic or worse. Such a torrent of unscrupulous malignity has never burst on the head of any statesman in our time. The calculation was that the unparalleled violence of this concerted onslaught would prevent the Home Rule Bill from passing its first reading, that is to say, would inflict on Mr. Gladstone, not merely a defeat, but an insult; his influence would be shattered, and the prestige which long success had given him would be at an end.

Well, this desperate attempt to suppress the Bill before it had even been seen, and to drive its author from public life just as you would bundle a drunken man out of an orderly assembly, has failed. It was the only chance of neutralising the prodigious impulse given to Home Rule by his conversion, and it has failed. The Bill is before the country, and every day shows more clearly that the mass of the Liberal party is prepared to support it. But whether it passes in the present form or not is of quite

secondary importance. The essential point gained is that Home Rule is irrevocably inscribed on the programme of the Liberal party, and we know that what is once set down there is bound to come sooner or later.

In the face of this remarkable and rapid adhesion of Liberals throughout the country, where is the reasonableness of Mr. Bright's complaint that more time should have been allowed for ventilating the question? Translated into plain English, this means that Members of Parliament, especially some of the more prominent of them, having regard to many foolish and often insincere utterances when they were on the stump last autumn, would have preferred to make their conversion appear more gradual and spontaneous. It is not consistent with their dignity, forsooth, to face about so rapidly. It lends countenance to the monstrous calumny that a Member of Parliament sometimes changes his opinions in obedience to pressure from his constituents. But time pressed, and Mr. Gladstone felt that he had more important things to consider than how he should help honourable gentlemen to lift the other leg over the fence in a dignified and graceful way. He judged that the adhesion of his party would be secured more speedily and effectually by going straight to the people, and his judgment has proved correct.

It is idle to raise the cry of despotism and dictation. Mr. Gladstone reigns indeed; but it is in the hearts of the people. They are learning that if they want their business done, they must find a man they can trust, and depute him to do it. Parliaments—yes, and cabinets—are honeycombed with personal intrigues and ignoble jealousies. What a sorry spectacle it has been! But the self-seekers have received a rude lesson. They never imagined that Mr. Gladstone, who had always shown a genuine veneration for rank, and a deplorable backwardness to make full use of his unparalleled influence, would at last put forth his strength. When Whig peers pouted, a stonemason was called in—a memorable warning to Whig peers. To help him in shaping the bill, Mr. Gladstone wisely summoned to his side, not the proprietors of rival

schemes, but the man who of all others had done most to prepare the public mind and to educate it out of its prejudices. The courage and staunchness of Mr. Morley will never be forgotten. He has already won for himself a large measure of the trust and attachment that have been the strength of the veteran leader.

I remember when the liberation of Italy and the abolition of slavery in the United States seemed distant and even improbable. That I should have been privileged to see two such glorious triumphs of justice and humanity in my time was more than my share of good fortune. And now I have lived to see the dawn of another glad day, rich in its promise of a future, happier for Ireland, nobler for England. Nay, it is no mere promise for the future. We are to-day better men and happier men, those of us who are putting our hands to this sacred work, because the uneasy load of national wrong-doing is already lifted from our consciences. Not ours any more the guilt if we are doing our best, each of us according to his means and opportunities, to wipe it away. Nothing can give peace of mind in political action but a firm resolve never to recognise as politically right what is morally wrong. Those who know that peace must from their hearts wish it to all their countrymen.

May 8, 1886.